

NEWS LETTER

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Forefathers' Day, November 21st, 1954

A DAY OF REMEMBRANCE

In agreement with the vote of the General Council of our churches, the Congregational Christian Historical Society suggests that Sunday, November 21st, be held sacred as a Day of Remembrance for those heroic men and women who, at great sacrifice and with much suffering, prepared the way for us and for the generations still to follow. Such a day set apart by the churches to thought and prayerful consideration of what are the blessings we enjoy by reason of the Fathers' travail of soul and body, will not only give a true meaning to our national observance of Thanksgiving Day, but will recharge our lives with rekindled faith and devotion to those principles they thought were worth more than even life itself.

They were pioneers in the realm of the Spirit, testing God's leadership for men. They sought to know his mind and to draw from him those insights to truth upon which they could build their own lives more in harmony with his teachings and to open the way for better living for all men. Again and again their words, as preserved for us express the fervent hope that out of their sacrifices and their experiences, those who would come after them might enter a fuller and freer life. They lived not alone for themselves but for us in this generation and for ages to come. Let us then study their lives, profit by their experiences and give thanks to Almighty God that these men and women lived and worked. Let us make this day a day of remembrance. Forefathers' Day should be made a day of worthy significance by our churches.

F. L. F.

FOREFATHERS' DAY PRAYER

may be used in unison

O God, before whose face the generations rise and pass away: age after age the living seek thee, and find that of thy faithfulness there is no end. Our fathers, in their pilgrimage, walked by thy guidance, and rested on thy compassion. Still to us, their children, be thou the cloud by day, the fire by night; where but in thee have we covert from the storm or shadow from the heat of life? In our manifold temptations, thou alone knowest and are ever nigh. In sorrow thy comfort renews our life. In prosperity and ease, it is thy spirit only that can wean us from pride and selfishness. O Thou sole source of peace and righteousness, take now the veil from every heart, and join us in one communion with thy prophets and saints, who have trusted in thee and have been left desolate. Not of our witness, but by thy tender mercy, hear our prayer; in Jesus' name. AMEN.

GOVERNOR WILLIAM BRADFORD OF PLYMOUTH

William Bradford was born in the year 1599 in the little Yorkshire village of Austerfield. He was an orphan boy, thoughtful, studious, venturesome. He became a faithful reader of the Bible at the age of twelve. As a youth he walked to Babworth, ten miles distant, to listen to the young Puritan preacher, Richard Clyfton, and to become a member of the worshiping fellowship gathered in the home of Postmaster William Brewster, in Scrooby. Influenced by these men, and by John Robinson, who was to be his pastor in Amsterdam and Leyden, Bradford gained his vision of a church as a fellowship of Christian believers, free and pledged "to walk in all his (God's) ways, made known, or to be made known unto them, according to their best endeavor, whatsoever it should cost them." Always true to this covenant he learned to love the "sweet communion" of the "beloved community" which was his church.

William Bradford was elected governor of the Plymouth Colony and served thirty-one years. If ever there was a community builder he was one, a man of action who learned by experience that "all great and honorable actions are accompanied with great difficulties and must be both enterprised and overcome with answerable courages."

As official leader of the colony, giving his services without salary, caring for innumerable administrative details, wisely and humanely dealing with the Indians, he never lost his boyhood vision of the Beloved Community, the church of his utmost devotion.

Bradford's "History of Plymouth Plantation" ranks as one of the great books of the seventeenth century. It is a deeply moving story of our history and source book of American folklore. Some lines of verse written by Bradford express the quality of his spirit and the sources of his strength:

"From my years young in days of youth,
God did make known to me his truth,
And call'd me from my native place
For to enjoy the means of grace.
In wilderness he did me guide,
And in strange lands for me provide.
In fears and wants, through weal and woe,
A Pilgrim passed I to and fro."

The ideal of a Beloved Community, with its "sweet communion" of believers, rises anew before us as we prepare to celebrate Forefathers' Day. Let us claim it for our own, with humble, thankful hearts, as our ideal, for our churches, our nation and our world, the Faith of our Fathers, living still!

ARTHUR H. BRADFORD

THOMAS HOOKER OF HARTFORD

Thomas Hooker (1586-1647) was one of the distinguished company of English Puritans who became the builders of New England. He was educated at that "seedbed of Puritanism," the University of Cambridge. He became minister at Esher, Surrey, and later lecturer in St. Mary Church, Chelmsford. But his effective and spoken advocacy of the cause of Puritanism brought upon him the wrath of Archbishop Laud, and he sought refuge in hospitable Holland. From thence, in 1633, he came to New England. He and his congregation were granted lands in Newtown (now Cambridge), where his parsonage stood in what is now the Harvard Yard. But within less than a year, the church petitioned the General Court for leave to remove to Connecticut, alleging among other reasons "their want of accommodation in Newtown." The real reason appears to have been that Hooker disagreed with the leaders over the restriction of the franchise to church members.

He was primarily a preacher whose extemporaneous sermons and discourses testify to his outstanding ability. Hooker was also a statesman whose ideas influenced not only Connecticut but the course of time became potent in the political thinking of all colonies. His theories were preserved in a sermon preached in 1638:

"I. That the choice of public magistrates belongs unto the people by God's allowance."

II. The privilege of election, which belongs to the people, therefore must not be exercised according to their humors, but according to the blessed will and law of God.

III. They who have power to appoint officers and magistrates, it is in their power also to set bounds and limitations of the power placed unto which they call them."

Hooker's political ideas were very much in advance of many of the other leaders of Massachusetts: for he advocated the democratic principle that all adult men (and not only church members) have the right to elect their officers. But the people are not to exercise their function "according to their humors." They are to be guided by "the will and laws of God." Thus he would not agree with our democratic voting habits, which often are "according to their humor" indeed!

Thomas Hooker is thus not only the founder of Hartford, the first minister of its church, and inspirer of the first democratic Constitution, his influence extends even to the founding of the Republic, since its Constitution incorporates the principles so valiantly advocated by him.

MATTHEW SPINK

A SYMPOSIUM: "THE LASTING INFLUENCE OF THE FATHERS"

American culture, while difficult to define, is always associated with the deep conviction that voluntarism and popular consent must be elementary factors in just government. This is emphasized by the amazing prophetic quality of the Mayflower Compact, with its clear assertion that the authority of government derives from the consent of the governed. This doctrine is the basic religious ground for democratic convictions.

Back of these convictions lay a definite view of the nature of man, of his having been made in his Maker's image. This, rather than the ideas of the French Enlightenment, accounts for the mood which prevails in the writings of the Fathers. This same idea is basic in the Declaration of Independence with its affirmation that "man was endowed by his Creator with certain inalienable rights." In the exercise of those rights in private and in public leaders are under the obligation to rely on persuasion and not compulsion since all men are presumed to possess the same rights.

HENRY SMITH LEIPER

New York, N. Y.

New England Congregationalism has made an impact upon American culture because its adherents have in large measure recognized their responsibility to translate Christian faith into Christian works. The spirit of the Mayflower Compact, with its concern for the "general good" of the colony, is exemplified today on a national scale through the Council for Social Action.

Congregationalism as a form of church polity has emphasized the significance of the individual as an agent of God's providential purposes and has inspired its members to become witnesses of the Christian faith in many and varied "callings." In the long history of the denomination countless numbers have experienced God's saving grace in Jesus Christ and have then been led to show forth their salvation in acts of Christian service.

Specifically, New England Congregationalism provided spiritual leadership in affairs of state during the colonial and early federal periods; and it practiced a helpful cooperative relationship between church and state. New England Congregationalism, true to its genius of combining faith and works, gave early impetus to home and foreign missionary endeavors, produced strong leaders for a vital social gospel movement, and has played an important part in the fostering of the ecumenical movement.

FREDERICK W. WHITTAKER Bangor Seminary

Congregationalism played a highly significant role in New England's contribution to American culture. Great influence has been exerted through its educational institutions. Harvard and Yale, Williams and Dartmouth, Oberlin and Carleton, and forty more, are leaders in education throughout the land. The Congregationalists had some of the greatest men produced in the colonial period: Johnathan Edwards, and the greatest of all Protestant missionaries in that period, John Eliot. Many movements had their beginnings in these churches: home and foreign missions, theological seminaries, temperance, social gospel, and the work among the Negroes in the South. They likewise led the way in higher education for women, notably Antioch and Oberlin College, and Mount Holyoke College, the first woman's college. Above all else, Congregationalism has been a patron of pure democracy. Its churches have been schools of democracy.

GEORGE EISENACH

Yankton College

The current issue of *Church History* (June, 1954) features a series of articles on Puritanism that bear witness to the rich diversity which contemporary historical scholarship has rediscovered in the Puritan heritage. For "covenantal Calvinism," as we are coming to characterize Puritanism, was not the legalistic, anti-cultural moralism and dour impoverishment of Christianity which has been so often pilloried in popular accounts. It was rather so comprehensive and creative a religio-cultural synthesis that its vital forces could never be wholly contained in any one historic achievement and the holy experiments in both new and old England were eventually obliged to split up into diverse impulses which, though weakened and often in conflict, still significantly influence our religious, cultural, and political life. Puritanism was, moreover, a movement of international scope in which our religious forebears in America participated learnedly and devoutly as peers with fellow-Calvinists in England and on the Continent. Puritanism is thus a complex and precious heritage from the pre-nationalist period of American history. Upon its rich substance we may draw anew for that radical reconception of our religious and political convictions appropriate to the new period in our American development when we have become again international and ecumenical in our point of view.

GEORGE H. WILLIAMS, Harvard Divinity School

NOTES

"COMPACT" DAY

As we observe Forefathers' Day this year on November 21st, the Sunday preceding Thanksgiving Day, we should remember that November 21st is also known as "Compact Day" as it is the anniversary of the signing of the Compact in the cabin of the Mayflower in 1620. This fact adds significance to our observance of Forefathers' Day this year.

THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE SOCIETY

This meeting, to be held in the Old South Church, Boston, Wednesday, November 10th, will open with a luncheon at 12.30 P.M. in honor of Professor Perry Miller of Harvard. Members and friends cordially invited. Reservations at \$1.25 per person should be mailed not later than November 6th to Rev. John A. Harrer, Treasurer, 14 Beacon Street, Boston 8, Mass. The business meeting will follow at 2.00 P.M. with reports, forward plans and election of officers. **FREDERICK L. FAGLEY, Secretary**

"SHARE OUR SURPLUS PROGRAM"

How might we better observe Forefathers' Day than by giving to the Share Our Surplus Program of Church World Service for the destitute and hungry of the world: "Because of their scarcity — out of our abundance." This spirit of sharing marked that first Thanksgiving Day.

THE GENERAL COUNCIL VOTE

New Haven—June 30, 1954

Whereas the celebration of Forefathers' Day on December 21 has fallen into disuse because of the overshadowing devotion to Christmas four days later, and

Whereas the loss of Forefathers' Day from our ecclesiastical calendar seems unfortunate, and

Whereas a day earlier in autumn, marking the long period when the Pilgrim Fathers were on the high seas, would seem equally appropriate:

Be It Resolved That we recommend to all the churches, associations, conferences and mission boards that the Sunday preceding Thanksgiving be observed as Forefathers' Day with appropriate services.

WALK PROUDLY, FRIEND!

As one pastor to another may I send personal message to our pastors.

Many have walked this way before you called by God ever since early time. Abraham walked forth in faith. So did Amos and Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah, going the way of Christ. Jesus was the Way, and he walked by the way of Galilee, through the gates of the Holy City and out to Golgotha. Time would fail to tell of Polycarp, Savonarola, Hus, and thousands of others.

Walk proudly, friend, in faith. Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli walked this way, and the years that followed, Robinson, Jacob, Ann Bradford, Winthrop, and Mather. Hooker walked into the wilderness of Connecticut, and Whitman into the great Northwest. Our fathers were not afraid, for they walked in faith. Walk proudly, brother, for we are treading where the great have trod. They made the word of God prevail. That word is so greatly needed in this our day. Let this Forefathers' Day be a time of great thanksgiving for our heritage that is ours; let it be a time of proclamation of where and how and why our Fathers walked. Let us be aware of God's command.

Brother-in-Christ, walk proudly, for the God who called our fathers, still calls to us today. Our people await our forward step.

CLIFFORD O. SIMPSON Manchester, Conn.
Chairman Forefathers' Day Committee

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